



# State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

**Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent**

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## **BEST PRACTICE FOR HOMELESS PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

It is important for children experiencing homelessness to be given the opportunity to have early development and enrichment experiences that enable them to improve their social and academic skills. Below are “best practice” recommendations for the identification and enrollment of preschool children from homeless families into early education programs.

- Identification of homeless families in need of preschool education services is more effective when personal relationships exist between community service providers and school district homeless liaisons.
- Collaboration between district staff and community partners not only improves the identification and enrollment of homeless preschool children into early education programs, but also increases the potential for providing additional services and training for staff and parents.
- “Release of Information” forms should be used between community agencies and school districts with preschool programs to help families experiencing homelessness enroll their children into early education programs.
- District staff participation on community interagency councils develops a common understanding of the resources available in the community and enables better coordination of services.
- Efforts to meet the needs of homeless families are enhanced by the involvement of staff from emergency shelters, Birth to 3, public health and human services on community councils.
- Meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, transportation, health care, safety, and dependable, consistent care by a responsible adult are of primary importance to effectively educate preschool children from homeless families.
- “Child Find” efforts required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) should take into consideration families who do not have a permanent residence. Districts should invite families residing in emergency shelters (domestic abuse and homeless) and transitional housing programs to participate in the Child Find process.
- Relationships between the district homeless liaison and Head Start staff are important toward the goal of identifying and enrolling children into Head Start programs.
- Parents in homeless situations need to be affirmed as the primary educators of their children. Success in school increases when parents are involved in the educational planning and assessment for their children.
- Parents of children in homeless situations need opportunities to strengthen their parenting and coping skills in order to effectively manage stresses related to raising children without the benefit of

permanent housing. Programs which offer child abuse prevention, parenting skills, and life skills support both parents and their children.

- Preschool programs which address the needs of parents are the most successful. Community agencies that offer parent support groups and family services (Head Start, Community Action, University of Wisconsin-Extension, and Family Resource Centers) should partner with school districts in order to provide more resources to both sheltered and unsheltered families.
- To best meet the needs of preschool children from families experiencing homelessness, staff members from school districts, Head Start agencies, and early education programs should be provided with information about the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act.
- Educators, community service providers, and family advocates need training about how the “culture of poverty” and homelessness impact the educational needs of preschool children.
- Preschool children experience marked progress in their growth and development when they can enroll into early education programs. Transportation services enable the preschool child to have consistent access to quality care and education.
- Planning preschool educational services for homeless families lacking transportation should involve the least amount of transition and travel for the child. There is less cost for the program and more consistency for the child and family when required services are provided at one site.
- Early education environments supporting social and emotional development, as well as academic skills, are the most effective for homeless children. Teachers and early education staffs need training to develop positive strategies to support the social, emotional, and cognitive skills for homeless preschool children.
- District preschools and community-based early education and care programs should align their curriculum and assessment practices with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. These standards guide the implementation of programs which aid preschool children from homeless families to develop the social, emotional, and cognitive skills necessary to prepare them for their formal educational years.

For additional information regarding preschool age children who may be experiencing homelessness contact Linda Hurst at (608) 266-5184 or [linda.hurst@dpi.state.wi.us](mailto:linda.hurst@dpi.state.wi.us) .